

Establish Permanent Law to Allow Overseas Dispatch of SDF

By NABESHIMA Keizo

The new Anti-Terrorism Special Measure Law was enacted when it was re-passed by more than a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives on January 11. Policy debate should now move to the next major theme of establishing a permanent law to allow the dispatch of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) for overseas activities as occasion demands. The suspension of refuelling activities in the Indian Ocean has lowered Japan's international repute. This new law is the legislation of specified duration of one year. Therefore, unless the law is re-passed again in the next year, the refuelling activities will once again face suspension. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the leading party in the House of Councilors, blatantly led the discussion astray, due to their ulterior motive of trying the Fukuda Cabinet to dissolve the House of Representatives. While the DPJ was opposing the re-passing of the new Anti-Terrorism Law, Mr. OZAWA Ichiro, the president of DPJ, left the chamber when a vote was taken and was criticized even from within his own ranks as irresponsible. Can he really appeal to voters as being fit to govern with such behavior?

Prime Minister FUKUDA Yasuo said in his policy speech that consideration of a permanent law should proceed "for the purpose of implementing expeditiously and effectively international peace cooperation activities," and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) launches a project team to work on the issue. Mr. FUKUDA proposed to Mr. OZAWA policy consultations on such issues as a permanent law as well as the social security/pension system at the party leaders meetings in November last year. Mr. OZAWA has his own particular views on such a permanent law and it would seem there is common ground between the government/ruling parties and the DPJ. But the LDP and the DPJ differ on the conditions for dispatch. The LDP supports participating under the auspices of United Nations (UN) resolutions, requests by other international organizations, and alongside multi-national forces led primarily by the US. On the other hand, the DPJ supports limiting activities to those based on UN resolutions only. The debate centers on policing activities, relaxing criteria for the use of weapons, and implementing the right of Collective Self Defense.

The Komeito Party within the ruling coalition has fixed views on the Article 9

framework of the Constitution, not allowing the right of Collective Self Defense to be exercised. Opinions within the DPJ vary with some, such as Mr. MAEHARA Seiji, former party leader, arguing that actions should not be bound by UN resolutions because China and Russia will likely use their right of veto to block resolutions in the UN Security Council (UNSC). Considering the fact that the DPJ voted in November 2006 to make international peace cooperation activity a main duty to the SDF in the Amendment to the SDF Law, allowing the bill to be passed with over 90% of House of Representatives members in favor, the DPJ should also adopt a conciliatory stance toward a permanent law to allow SDF dispatches.

According to various public opinion polls, opinions appear split on the new Anti-Terrorism Law and any permanent law. What would benefit the national interest of Japan at this time? First, the US-Japan alliance must not be shaken. Many Japanese have a poor understanding that as a non-nuclear country, Japan depends on the US nuclear umbrella for its protection. If the alliance falters, Japan would have no guarantee of security surrounded by China, Russia and North Korea. Second, Japan has a responsibility as a major power to maintain international peace and security. This is all the more so if Japan wants to become a permanent member of the UNSC. Thirdly, more awareness among the general population of security issues is needed. Past governments have been remiss in fully explaining how US and Japanese forces maintain territorial and maritime integrity, provide sea-lane defense, and protect citizens' safety and prosperity. We have to work more to deepen the understanding among people about the necessity of permanent law allowing overseas dispatches of SDF. Less than a year remains to complete this task.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. NABESHIMA Keizo, Former Chief Editorial Writer for Kyodo News, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Seiho" of JFIR on January 23, 2008.)